

RADIO TV REPORTS, INC.

4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM Dan Rather Commentary STATION WTOP Radio
CBS Network

DATE October 30, 1984 5:40 PM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Nicaragua

DAN RATHER: Dan Rather reporting, news and commentary.

This week, candidates Walter Mondale and Ronald Reagan head down the final stretch of a race that will end November 6th. But two days before the U.S. casts its vote, another election will take place. The citizens of Nicaragua will vote in national elections for the first time since their revolution five years ago.

It could be an historic vote. Instead, it is the focus of an international debate.

The vote in Nicaragua, in a moment.

* * *

Sunday's elections in Nicaragua are slated to install a president, vice president and 90-member National Assembly. Some are calling these the first free elections in that nation's history. Other have already branded the plebiscite a sham.

The vote and the dissention over its significance comes at a critical time for Nicaragua. Critics focus their attention on the absence of opposition leader Arturo Cruz from the candidates list. Cruz heads up a conservative coaltioon and is a staunch adversary of the ruling Sandinista leadership.

But, some feel the importance of Cruz may have been overplayed. His support comes mainly from the small middle and upper class in Nicaragua. His close ties to Washington make him

OFFICES IN: WASHINGTON D.C. • NEW YORK • LOS ANGELES • CHICAGO • DETROIT • AND OTHER PRINCIPAL CITIES

suspicious to many in the nation where everything from food shortages to murder is blamed on the American CIA.

The recently disclosure of a CIA-authored manual on terrorism in Nicaragua only seems to substantiate their paranoia.

Nevertheless, Cruz enjoys an enthusiastic, if small, constituency.

On the government's part, the Sandinistas believe they have bent over backwards to accommodate Mr. Cruz. Three times the registration deadline was extended because of Cruz' reticence to declare his candidacy. Eventually, the government broke off negotiations to extend the election date, questioning whether the Cruz coalition was bargaining in good faith.

This summer, Cruz stated that he never intended to participate in the elections. But the Sandinistas are in a tough position.

Staunch ideologues can well argue that extending the vote could be a concession to the rebels who they view as CIA-backed terrorists. But holding the line points them down the path their critics predicted they would take all along. And despite the fact that the Salvadoran elections, which the opposition boycotted, were hailed by the Reagan Administration as a victory for democracy, it will not be so generous with Nicaragua.

Nevertheless, preparations continue with the controversial Sunday vote. The Nicaraguans are basically fiercely nationalistic people, wary about outside manipulation of their national business. They have opted to hold their elections their way.

But, they also want and perhaps may need the stamp of approval from the international community if the current regime is to survive.

With the Sandinistas quick endorsement of a multi-nation peace plan, their seeming improvements in health and literacy, they gain points. But, if the election proceeds as scheduled, they may lose a few points.

Now, please, this message.

*

*

*

Dan Rather reporting, CBS News.